

Music for Infants in U.K. Supporting Children's Development under EYFS

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Singing, dancing and music-making comes so naturally with young children and could be one of the most effective and rewarding activities we as practitioners encourage.

(Bance, *Music for Early Learners*, 2012, p. 2)

Abstract: Early childhood education urges nursery school teachers to develop fully the children in their classes. The importance of early childhood education reflects the revision of the education system in the UK, which will be referred to as the Early Year Foundation Stage (EYFS from now on). The revised version of EYFS has just been launched in nursery schools in September 2012. Although its contents and benefits will be discussed in the following section, this is clear evidence that the UK education authority is finally taking early childhood education more seriously. It had long been overlooked much greater emphasis on mandates and provision had been placed on primary education. This essay focuses on the education of children under 6 years of age. In the UK at three years old, children move on from home, childminder or day care into a preschool or nursery class then at the age of 4 move on to reception classes. The general attitude towards music for infants in a school setting might be "it is fun" or "they just love it". Taking into account this factor, it is important to observe carefully so as to be in a position to describe the present situation of children in terms of musical education. The focus of this essay is the influence of the (old or revised) EYFS. It will be discussed in terms of its social and pedagogical influences.

Keywords: children's music, nurseryschools in U.K., EYFS

Introduction

Early childhood education urges nursery school teachers to develop fully the children in their classes. The importance of early childhood education reflects the revision of the education system in the UK, which will be referred to as the Early Year Foundation Stage (EYFS from now on). Dowling notes:

In this country there is now a strong and established political searchlight on children aged under five.¹

The revised version of EYFS has just been launched in nursery schools in September 2012. Although its contents and benefits will be discussed in the following section, this is clear evidence that the UK education authority is finally taking early childhood education more seriously. It had long been over-

looked much greater emphasis on mandates and provision had been placed on primary education. Katz describes the importance of early childhood education:

...the importance of getting children off to a good start, and the risks involved in failing to do so, have become even more clear, even more urgent.²

This essay focuses on the education of children under six years of age. In the UK at three years old, children move on from home, childminder or day care into a preschool or nursery class then at the age of four move on to reception classes. Young mentions:

Today's children have to become adept at managing transmissions between the different places where they are cared for and educated.³

The general attitude towards music for infants in a school setting might be "it is fun" or "they just love it". Young comments:

I take it mean this understanding that music's value is because it is pleasurable and uplifting. This is so, and rightly so.⁴

Taking into account this factor, it is important to observe carefully so as to be in a position to describe the present situation of children in terms of musical education. The focus of this essay is the influence of the (old or revised) EYFS. It will be discussed in terms of its social and pedagogical influences.

Music and Infants

It is generally accepted that changes in UK society have affected its youngest citizens. Young describes how the present changing world brings "new uncertainties and new demands"⁵ which affect children. Young emphasises family and home issues as being of particular significance:

The changing nature of family life and new technologies in the home impact directly on young children's lives. Wider social, economic, ecological and political changes have a less direct, but no less significant, influence.⁶

Ouvry comments on the family influence on music:

All children know songs from their family's history and culture, and in their home language; they will have heard them since infancy and they form part of any child's identity.⁷

Campbell and Scott-Kassner also mention this point:

Music is part of their process of enculturation. They develop as members of their family, their neighborhood community, and their religious and ethnic groups through music.⁸

Music is an effective tool for learning about the society around children. Ouvry explains:

Very young children can learn their own history and culture, and that of others from songs and music.⁹

Young understands the changes and suggests that:

...music education practice needs to be regularly reconsidered, particularly in times of rapid change – such as the present.¹⁰

However, the status of music used to be weak compared to other areas such as language and environmental education. Young describes how “music is considered marginal and the preserve of specialist practitioners.”¹¹ However, the value of music is now more recognized. Hallam suggests:

There is growing evidence that active involvement in music-making can have positive benefits for children's intellectual and social development.¹²

Bance states that human beings are ‘born musical’, and cites Ponder and Harrison's theory:

From birth, we develop our musical awareness through communication, the expression of emotion and playfulness.¹³

Campbell and Scott-Kassner also describe that:

Music emerges magically from children, as they research for and find ways to represent their world. Intuitively and naturally, young children respond to music as they communicate through it.¹⁴

Taking into account those opinions, what kind of music should be ‘taught’ to infants and why should music be taught to those who are defined as ‘born-musical’? Even though children can be musical from birth, it is important to give them proper direction by giving them the fun factor. Ouvry explains:

Children need to experience the world in lots of different ways in order to make sense of it and draw from it when they like best. Because sound-making and rhythm is such a source of enjoyment to children, music is an excellent pathway into areas of the curriculum which they might otherwise see as difficult or irrelevant.¹⁵

Young proposes two main pathways to music for infants. One is adult-led which focuses on performance and singing, and the other is children-centred which is a free-choice, play-centred model to enable discovery and exploration by children themselves. In more detail, the adult-led way is suitable for larger group of children to be taught at once and it is necessary to introduce music properly. Children-centred is kind of free play, for example with instruments.¹⁶ However, in terms of music, the general practice used to be heavily weighed in favour of adult-led, content-based activity, according to Young.¹⁷ Under both circumstances children can learn music in different ways: direct transmission or discovering it for themselves. Patterson and Wheway set out suggested minimum requirements for music exposure during early years as follows:¹⁸

- The opportunity for children to explore and express themselves
- The chance to enjoy sound in any context; to respond to/and create music through the use of their voices and bodies
- Access to sound makers which should include appropriate percussion (tunes and untuned), but also the opportunities from materials such as paper, junk or recycled sources and the man-made/natural environment
- The chance to develop an inner sense of pulse and rhythm through beat and rhythm activities and through rhyme
- The opportunity to use sound to create music that is unique to themselves

Rutkowski and Hsee reported in 2006 on the role/aim of the adults when they supervise musical activities:¹⁹

- Imitate the child/children's actions (singing, vocalizing, instrument playing, moving, drama) and also offer ideas for children to imitate
- Assist the children in continuing musical ideas or allow the children to assist others
- Prompt new actions on the part of the child that are meaningful within the shared activity or allow for and take up prompts from the children
- Introduce new ideas that extend or enhance, without interrupting or taking over the direction of the activity, or take up ideas introduced by the children

For encouraging effective music activities, Young mentions the importance of quality of classroom and number of infants per class session. Regarding the number of children, Young suggests no more than eight to ten for one adult, with five the ideal. In UK nursery schools, there is a good ratio of teacher and carers for one class and this number seems to be agreeable. Place and spaces for music should be "not too small or too large, noisy or poorly furnished"²⁰ and Young suggests the space for music could be "defined by a circular rug, a piece of carpet, a blanket or a soft play mat"²¹ with plenty of equipment (instruments) covering the whole number of children per person. Nursery teachers need to be aware of "just how the accommodation and group size can influence the effectiveness of what teachers can achieve."²² At present, there are publications for music activities, which Young named 'fast books' as they simply present quick-fix tips and ready-made lessons²³, and infant school teachers have no difficulty making an activity as long as they follow the books.

Young describes the relationship between teachers and infants in a musical setting:

...their (children's) music arises from engaging with the people and things around them, turning the possibilities they hold into active music that they go on to play around with and be inventive with. And this is not a passive process of absorption but process in which children are active, turning it into something of their own.²⁴

The slight problem during musical childhood is related to children under four years of age. Parents of toddlers often use a 'drop-in' system at playgroup or nursery. This prevents nursery teachers from providing regular and stable music education. Young states:

The parents, childminders, may be reluctant to give up what is an important and necessary time out from the children take part in an important activities. In other settings adult may come to the sessions with fears about exposure to the group as a whole, both in music and in parenting terms.²⁵

So, how do we proceed with music session in an everyday nursery setting? Young mentions the importance of routines and repetitions. Firstly, she emphasizes the beginning and ending of the session "in the same, almost, ritualistic, ways provides predictability."²⁶ Here is the checklist of daily session which Young suggests for infants' music:²⁷

- One listening activity
- One movement activity or singing game
- One activity with sound-makers
- One or two puppet, toy or other prop songs
- Songs which involve musical contrasts, such as loud/quiet, slow/fast in many variations

The atmosphere of session is also suggested: it needs to be "higher-energy, stimulating activities followed by lower-pace, quieter activities."²⁸ Also Young adds that changing the position of group in one session would be useful for participation and independence of both infants and teachers. The effectiveness of this is always leaving options for sessions and, for infants, is not dictating that a song or activity must be done in a certain way.

Young listed the aims and requirements for nursery school teachers who teach music at nursery school as follows:²⁹

Ex. 1. Musical pre-school children (extract)

- Sing spontaneously in a range of different ways, alone and with others
- Learn to sing in own vocal range
- Begin to pitch match, keep in time with and coordinate their musical ideas with others
- Can repeat, transform, combine and develop their own musical ideas
- Learn to control and coordinate whole body and finer body movements
- Dance spontaneously to recorded/live music
- Are 'open-eared' to wide range of musical styles and knowledgeable about music from their home culture
- Can be an audience listener to live music for short periods of time

Ex. 2. Teacher's role for teaching music to pre-school children (extract)

- Provide a rich diet of songs, play-songs, music games into the everyday
- Provide instruments and settings for self-initiated music play with voice, instruments and dancing
- Listen and observe, tuning in to children's ways of being musical
- Respond and play creatively with children in music, allowing them to retain the initiative
- Begin to comment and describe
- Support children learning to sing songs by providing appropriate learning opportunities
- Support children learning to play instruments by modeling
- Provide opportunities to hear a variety of recorded and live music representing different styles and cultures
- Model using music in everyday life

Those lists are quite important for those who teach music for younger children.

Influence of EYFS in Musical Aspects

The EYFS is a document based on clear principles and it supports the child's development and learning from zero to five years.³⁰ The principle of the 2012 EYFS is:

- Unique child
- Positive relationship
- Enabling environment
- Children develop and learn in different ways and at different rates

As mentioned above, the reforms to the 2012 EYFS changed a few points. Among the changes regarding the teaching of music, three significant points can be noted. Firstly, 'three prime areas (communication and language, physical development, and personal, social and emotional development)' and 'four specific areas (literacy, mathematics, understanding the world and expressive arts and design)' are set, like the National Curriculum (NC) in primary education. Music is included in specific areas under the name 'Expressive Arts and Design'. 'Expressive Arts and Design' involves:

...enabling children to explore and play with a wide range of media and materials, as well as providing opportunities and encouragement for sharing their thoughts, ideas and feelings through a variety of activities in art, music, movement, dance, role-play, and design and technology."³¹

In the NC music is still included in the non-prime area. Secondly, the early learning goal is reduced dramatically from 69 to 17. This may reduce the teacher's paperwork and also psychological pressure for children of such a young age. Thirdly, the balance between play and teaching "activities led by children and activity led or guided by adults"³² are more strongly required. The EYFS particularly addressed the young children's personal, social and emotional development in the principles. Dowling

describes the aim of the government is “for all children to be ready for school with at least 90 per cent of children by age five developing well across all areas of the EYFS”.³³ Before EYFS started, Young identified the problem of actual classroom practice in nursery schools:

Methods conceived in the first half of the last century still have a strong influence on practice...Not that they necessary need to be abandoned – just thoughtfully reappraised in the light of contemporary time.³⁴

Given that, teaching targets by EYFS are also clarifying some misunderstandings for a number of nursery teachers who tended to think that all that was necessary for teaching music to infants was “a few cure songs and having a few activities up their (teachers) sleeve.”³⁵ Also, regarding one of the key points EYFS’ ‘creative development’, Young has concerns about the nursery classroom. She identifies:

(a) poor fit between the general overarching recommendations for fostering creative development and the specific guidance points that relate to music...music is generally introduced to children in a way that emphasis conformity rather than creativity.³⁶

Young locates the position of music:

These days music is not closely linked to the current goal of education...what often happens is that its purpose is linked with things ‘use-ful’, so that arguing for music in terms of its ability to support children’s social skills, their language and so on is what dominates.³⁷

EYFS also points out that children from non-English speaking backgrounds should be given the opportunities “to develop and use their home language in play and learning, supporting their language development at home.”³⁸ Music could be useful for those children who will be given the opportunities to introduce songs or singing games from their own culture as well as English musical songs or singing games. Pound and Harrison suggest factors which are needed to be included in the curriculum for younger children:³⁹

- Singing
- Playing a range of instruments and sound-making materials
- Making up songs in response to a range of stimuli
- Making up music in response to a range of stimuli
- Making up music in response to dance
- Listening to a range of live music
- Moving in response to music
- Responding to music through the use of a range of creative media; including spoken language
- Recording musical ideas in a range of forms or media

These factors are totally acceptable though, the 2012 EYF’s learning goals of ‘Expressive Arts and De-

sign' are only the two listed below:

- Exploring ad using media and materials
- Being imaginative

Considering these points, governments are clearly emphasising the effective use of media. This seems to be linked to the nature of this area which is, after all, concerned with various type or art. The points mentioned above seem to be less directly connected to 'music 2012' in UK nurseries. Instead, it seems that music can be more useful in all other six areas, such as English, mathematics, understanding the world. It seems to be difficult to advance skills in music for infants in 'music'. However, if music used in other areas usefully, it can be beneficial both for teachers who would struggle to teach other areas for younger children and for children who could thus experience and learn various subjects in a non-threatening way. Bance mentioned the importance of cross-curricular factors in infant music. She suggests musical activities of her own design in her publication activities:

(it) offers a wealth songs and musical activities that aim to reach out and support all areas of our children's learning including language and communication; personal, social and emotional development; number and pattern; understanding our world; and physical, creative and musical development.⁴⁰

The above words show educators' common aim of composing younger children's teaching materials. Ouvry outlines the principles of music education in the early childhood setting. Here is an extract from the list:⁴¹

- All children are natural musicians and singers
- Music can be integrated into every experience
- Children's natural curiosity and sense of wonder flourishes through a wide range of sound and musical experiences
- Children become more musically aware and learn best from adults and practitioners

Play and music is difficult to distinguish in children's daily life at nursery school. Therefore, according to Ouvry, if the principles below are incorporated into classroom practice, they can be classified as music play:⁴²

- Real-life experience of music is used in play
- Items which have been made or found are used as play props in musical play
- Sounds and singing are incorporated into play
- Music is used as part of role play
- Articles are transformed from one thing and used as something else in pretend play
- Children play an instrument, explore sound or sing alone or with others, spontaneously and cooperatively

- Recently acquired skills and competencies are tried out as play allowing the children to be in control and go at their own pace

Taking into account the music play factor, Young describes the influence on children in the EYFS. By focusing on the importance of principles and values of play-centered practice, the EYFS curriculum ensures:

...learning through play, promotes creative and imaginative activity, and promotes approaches that start with the children's competences and interests.⁴³

Conclusion : Be Musical Children

Dowling describes the rising status of early years education in the Independent Review of the Primary Curriculum (2008) as "emphasizing the role of play as a valuable means of learning and stressing the need for children to experience smooth transitions based on play-based learning as they move into Year 1"⁴⁴ in primary school. Patterson and Wheway list ten suggestions for nursery school teachers:⁴⁵

- Children copy adults
- Keep activities simple
- Children develop at different rates
- Music is organized sound
- Performance – develop opportunities to value stages of the process of music making
- Encourage children to care for instruments
- Children bring with them a wealth of musical experience
- Develop clear ways of controlling noise
- Encourage children to care for instruments
- Learning across the curriculum – e.g. story and rhymes, painting and pictures, scientific development, numbers and counting, inter-relationships

However, Young points out that there is comparatively little research into early childhood music. As shown above, early childhood music is full of treasures both for practical research and for planning effective learning. Therefore both researcher and practitioner need to deal with infants' music more purposely and effectively. Young describes the early childhood settings as "the place for music"⁴⁶, and summarized:

...but for children who dance, dramatize, vocalise, play with toys, their friends, the adults around, or play equipment and in and out of spaces, the separation of activities and experiences into single strands of activity such as 'music' makes little sense.⁴⁷

Researchers and teachers are thus required to understand infant music in terms of theory first, then move to practice. This also gives infants plenty of access to music of good quality and development of

their personality effectively.

The prospects of music for younger children in the school setting are relatively positive. Pound and Harrison state that:

Music is such an important part of all human life and clearly has a strong motivating effect on all of us, including children, that using music across the curriculum can only have a positive effect on the quality of education.⁴⁸

Bance cites Wilson's words on the value of infant music:

Music is not only the effective primer for developing mind and body, but it is an exciting and progressive blend of scientific, artistic and physical disciplines that can be enjoyed at an early age...⁴⁹

These words allow us to comprehend the nature of music, which as researcher and practitioners, we should continuously bear in mind. Also, Ouvry, who "used music to catch children's attention"⁵⁰ when she was a teacher, describes the ideal responses of infants when they feel enjoyment in learning:⁵¹

- Enjoyment
- Concentration
- Listening
- Perseverance
- Self-confidence
- Willingness to take risks
- Commitment to the task
- Exploration
- Problem-solving
- Questioning

Therefore, nursery school teachers are expected to provide musical input to infants who should react to music as above. This is essential for the teaching of music to younger children, not only in U.K. but everywhere.

Footnotes

- 1 Marion Dowling, *Young Children's Personal, Social & Emotional Development* (third edition) (London: SAGE, 2010), p. 8.
- 2 Op. cit., p. vii.
- 3 Suzan Young, *Music 3-5*, (London: Routledge, 2009; first published in 2005), p. 8.
- 4 Op. cit., p. 9.
- 5 Op. cit., p. 7.

- 6 Op. cit., p. 7.
- 7 Marjorie Ouvry, *Sounds Like Playing* (London: Early Education, 2004), pp.12-13.
- 8 Patricia Shehan Campbell and Carol Scott-Kassner, *Music in Childhood* (third edition), (Boston, Shirmer, 2006), preface, p. xi.
- 9 Ouvry, *Sounds Like Playing*, p. 12.
- 10 Young, *Music 3-5*, p. 7
- 11 Op. cit., p. 11.
- 12 Linda Bance, *Music for Early Learners* (London: Routledge, 2012), p. 2.
- 13 Op. cit., p. 7.
- 14 Campbell and Scott-Kassner, *Music in Childhood*, preface, p. xi.
- 15 Ouvry, *Sounds Like Playing*, p. 11.
- 16 Young, *Music 3-5*, p. 17.
- 17 Op.cit., p. 29.
- 18 Anice Patterson and David Wheway, *Kickstart Music* (London: A&C Black, 2011; first published in 2010), p. 3.
- 19 Young, *Music 3-5*, p. 23
- 20 Op. cit., p. 4
- 21 Op. cit., p. 85.
- 22 Suzan Young, *Music with the under-fours* (London: Routledge, 2003), p. 84.
- 23 Young, *Music 3-5*, p. 7.
- 24 Op. cit., p. 13.
- 25 Young, *Music with the under-fours*, p. 71.
- 26 Young, *Music 3-5*, p. 82.
- 27 Young, *Music with the under-fours*, p. 83.
- 28 Op. cit., p. 83.
- 29 Op. cit., pp. 134-5.
- 30 Dowling, *Young Children's Personal, Social & Environmental Development*, p. 5.
- 31 Department for Education (DfE), *Statutory Framework for the Early Years Foundation Stage* (published by DfE on 27 March 2012), p. 5.
- 32 DfE, *Overall Reforms to the 2012 EYFS Framework* (published by DfE, 2012), p. 1.
- 33 Dowling, *Young Children's Personal Social & Environmental Development*, p. 2.
- 34 Young, *Music 3-5*, p. 7.
- 35 Op. cit., p. 11
- 36 Op. cit., p. 29.
- 37 Op. cit., p. 9.
- 38 DfE, *Statutory Framework for the Early Years Foundation Stage*, p. 6.
- 39 Linda Pound and Chris Harrison, *Supporting Musical Development in the Early Years* (Buckingham: Open University Press, 2009; first published in 2003), p. 47.
- 40 Bance, *Music for Yearly Learners*, p. 3.
- 41 Ouvry, *Sounds Like Playing*, p. 29.
- 42 Op. cit., pp. 32-3.
- 43 Young, *Music 3-5*, p. 9.
- 44 Dowling, *Young Children's Personal Social & Emotional Environment*, p. 2.
- 45 Patterson and Wheway, *Kickstart Music*, p. 4.
- 46 Young, *Music 3-5*, p. 9.
- 47 Op. cit., p. 4.
- 48 Pound and Harrison, *Supporting Musical Development in the Early Years*, pp. 69-70.

- 49 Bance, *Music for Early Learners*, p. 2.
 50 Ouvry, *Sounds Like Playing*, p. 14.
 51 Op. cit., pp. 11–12

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